

# Kamwe language

**Kamwe** also spelt **Kamue**) is a Chadic language spoken in Adamawa State, Borno State of Nigeria and in northwestern Cameroon.

The Kamwe people and language are sometimes called higi(higgi). Kamwe elders say "higgi" is an insult(Ngelai in vecemwe) and a derogatory word coined from "hagyi" and name scornfully tagged on the Kamwe by their neighbours the Margi, that literally means "grasshopper". Majority of the Kamwe people despise the derogatory name 'higgi'. Because grasshopper from which the derogatory word "higi/higgi is derived is a hopeless insect in Kamwe culture eaten by lizards and frogs because they are weak and vulnerable

Kamwe is a compound word derived from the words "Ka" and "Mwe" which means "People of". Kamwe stands for people of the same consanguinity and affinity. It means family kindred. Relatives bound together. It derived its meaning from a special type of native Kamwe ornament worn by close relatives of a deceased person.<sup>[4]</sup>

Elders say that in the past, a non-relatives of the Kamwe were not allowed to were the Mwe.

Some elders still think it means people of the heavens, people on the hills, mountains and even the sky in Vecemwe. There are more than 24 dialects of Vecemwe(Kamwe language) but Nkafa is the central dialect and is reduced into writing and literature. The Margi first called the Kamwe people "Higi" in 1937.<sup>[5]</sup>

In Nigeria about 80 percent of Kamwe are found in Michika Local Government Area of Adamawa State, Nigeria. A substantial number of them are also found in the local government areas of Mubi North, Hong, Gombi, Song and Madagali in Adamawa State. The Kamwe people are also found in Borno State, especially in Askira/Uba and Gwoza local government areas.

Blench (2019) lists **Mukta** of Mukta village, Adamawa State as part of the Kamwe cluster.<sup>[6]</sup>

Kamwe	
<b>Native to</b>	Nigeria and Cameroon
<b>Region</b>	Adamawa State and Borno State
<b>Native speakers</b>	700,000 (2019) <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Language family</b>	Afro-Asiatic <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Chadic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Biu–Mandara<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Kamwe<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Higi (A.3)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>'<i><b>Kamwe</b></i></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul>
<b>Dialects</b>	Psikye (Tsepkye)
Language codes	
<b>ISO 639-3</b>	hig – inclusive code Individual code: kvj – Psikye
<b>Glottolog</b>	kamw1239 (http://glottolog.org/resource/lan guoid/id/kamw1239) Kamwe <sup>[2]</sup> psik1239 (http://glottolog.org/resource/lan guoid/id/psik1239) Psikye <sup>[3]</sup>

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# Dialects

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There are twenty-four active dialects of the Kamwe language. The active Kamwe language dialects include Nkafa, Dakwa, Krghea (sometimes called Higgi Fali), Fwea, Humsi, Modi, Sina, and Tilyi; Blench (2006) considers Psikye to be another.<sup>[7]</sup> Nkafa dialect is well understood by all and are widely spoken. Being the main language of administration and commerce, and having a literary tradition.

# People

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[8]

Most Kamwe identify themselves with Mwe-ci-ka (Michika), the ancestral home of all Kamwe people. The name Mwecika(Michika) is a Nkafa phrase which means creeping in silently to hunt. Depicting how Kwada Kwakaa the warrior was moving stealthily on the Michika hills to hunt his games.

Kamwe literally means people of the same "consanguinity and affinity". The Kamwe people believe in a heavenly God called 'Hyalatamwe' Communication with Hyalatamwe directly is not possible in Kamwe culture. Hyalatamwe is revered and feared. Communication with him has to be through intermediaries called "Da melie or Tchehye shwa"

In the Kamwe culture, caste system does exist as the Kamwe race is broadly classified into 'Melie and Ka-Ligyi'.

The founder of Michika (Mwe-ci-ka) was said to be one Kwada Kwakaa, a prince from Kuli in Nkafamiya on the hills of Michika. Kwada Kwakaa was said to be a warrior hunter who could hunt lions and leopards just by himself. When his father, who was the King in Nkafamiya, got to know that Kwada was 'kwa' 'kaa',<sup>[9]</sup> he mandated Kwada to be the ruler in the present day Michika.

What is unique about the Kamwe people's culture is the way the name their children according to the child's birth from the mother. A first-born male child is named *Tizhe*, a first-born female child *Kuve*. The first ten children in Kamwe culture are named as follows:- First male child is Tizhe, the female child is Kuve. The second male child is Zira, the female is Masi. The third male child is Tumba, the female is Kwarramba, the fourth male child is Vand, the female is Kwanye. The fifth child is Kwaji whether male or female. The sixth child is Tari for male and Kwata for female. The seventh child is sini for male and Kwasini for female. The eighth child is Kwada for both male and Female. The ninth child is Drambi for both the male and female. The tenth child is called Kwatri for both the male and female child. Subsequently, any other child will have a suffix "hale" attached to the name signifying that the child was born in old age of the mother. Example is Kuve-hale or Zira-hale as the case may be.

Twins or multiple births are celebrated in Kamwe culture. Twins have special names depending on the gender and who is delivered first. First male twin is called Thakma, the second male twin is Pembi. First female twin is Thakma, second female twin is Kwalgha

Before the advent of Western legal system in Africa and especially Nigeria, the Kamwe People had an organised legal system of the King called "Mbege" as the sole adjudicator. Adjudication in Kamwe Language is called "Kita".



Kamwe cultural dancers.

To enhance cultural renaissance in Kamweland, annual cultural festival tagged "Kamwe People Annual Cultural Festival of Art and Culture has been staged in Michika Adamawa State Nigeria every First (1st) Saturday in the month of April every year since 2017. It is aimed at reviving the rich culture of the Kamwe people and attracts tourists from far and near.

During the maiden edition in 2017, a book titled the 'Kamwe People of Northern Nigeria: Origin, History and Culture was presented to the public.

## Notes

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1. **Kamwe** (<https://www.ethnologue.com/21/language/hig>) at *Ethnologue* (21st ed., 2018)  
**Psikye** (<https://www.ethnologue.com/21/language/kvj>) at *Ethnologue* (21st ed., 2018)
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Kamwe" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/kamw1239>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Psikye" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/psik1239>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
4. Kwache, Iliya Yame (2016). Kamwe People of Northern Nigeria: Origin, History and Culture. Prudent Press Kaduna.
5. Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria. C.K Meek 1931
6. Blench, Roger (2019). *An Atlas of Nigerian Languages* (4th ed.). Cambridge: Kay Williamson Educational Foundation.
7. Blench, 2006. *The Afro-Asiatic Languages: Classification and Reference List* (<http://rogerblench.info/Language/Afroasiatic/General/AALIST.pdf>) (ms)
8. Debki, Bitrus (2009) History and Culture of Kamwe People
9. Oral Interview with Shi Mairama Wape 1991.

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- Roger Mohrlang. 1972. *Higi Phonology*. Studies in Nigerian Languages 2. Zaria: Institute of Linguistics and Centre for the Study of Nigerian Languages.
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